

STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN SOCIAL STUDIES: ANY PEER GROUP INFLUENCE?

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ABSTRACT: *This work used the causal-comparative research design to explore the relationship between peer group influence and students' academic achievements in Social Studies. The sample comprised 160 Junior Secondary School (JSS) III^A students randomly selected from ten out of nineteen secondary schools in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Two instruments were used: The Peer Group Influence Assessment Questionnaire (PGIAQ) on a 4-point Likert and a 50-item multiple choice questions in Social Studies. The instruments were trial-tested and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 obtained. Data generated were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis (r) at 0.05 level of significance. The result permitted the conclusion that there was a significant positive relationship between peer group influence and students' academic achievements in Social Studies. This underscores the need to study group dynamics from the point of view of the development of students whose needs are, in the main, related to group living. This finding instructs parents, guardians and caregivers to keep a close watch on the companies their children and wards keep as such surely impact significantly on the academic performances of the affected children.*

KEYWORDS: Academic Performance, Group, Influence, Peer-Group, Social Studies

INTRODUCTION

Social Studies programmes involve a functional application of large varieties of “social concepts” that establish connective tissues around different subject matters. Such programmes are therefore designed to display an eclectic distillation of a variety of subject disciplines including the social sciences, arts and the sciences. This distillation calls for a meaningful clarification of the interrelationships and an understanding of the human and social chemistry that emerge from the interaction of these differentiated subject matter areas (Joof and Okam, 1989, Okam, 2002). Although the focal point of this subject is man within the environment, its attention and degree of intensity sharpen on problems of human survival and growth skills, interaction skills and agents of change of both man and environment (Luyang-Abia and Esu in Fan, 2012). Man is a social animal; he operates and survives in human groups.

A group is a plurality of persons who interact with one another in a given context more than they interact with anyone else. Interaction here means a process whereby two or more persons have an effect on each other and work together. The possibility or reciprocal communication is an essential element (Fan, 2014). Groups have the following characteristics: members interact among themselves over some period of time; each member identifies as part of the group and is seen as such by other members; members see themselves as being distinct from other groups; each member of the group is expected by the others to accept certain responsibilities and duties and to abide by certain norms, and is entitled to

certain privileges as a result of being a member. There is a division of labour in the activities carried out by the members of the groups. Some sort of arrangement is made so that different people contribute in different ways towards the realization of group's goal. A group that has a high level of group cohesiveness is much more successful in achieving their goal. The group motivates members to achieve the desired goal and their efforts increase.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Group living which begins with childhood peer interaction, according to Duruamaku (2002), has influence on each other. Ndifon (2003) posits that every child in school is a member of a very important group – his class. How he gets on with his class members affects his attitude towards school hence his learning. Ukpong (1999) observes that if the class is organized on cooperative lines, the success of one child will be positively reinforcing to the other children and the positive effect of the group success will, in turn, produce more favourable situation for future academic achievement. Ezewu (1983) notes that pupil-pupil interpersonal relationship in the classroom has a significant correlation with academic achievement, hence a pupil who is liked by his classmates performs higher than the one who is not liked. This awareness (of self-esteem, belonging to the group and good mental health) therefore makes him approach academic tasks with more confidence and vigour, which may lead to high academic achievement.

Obedeagu (1991) carried out a study on student-student relationship and its impact on learning outcomes. After sampling Senior Secondary Three (SS3) students from randomly selected secondary schools in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State, data collected were analysed – using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis, Independent t-test and Wilcoxon matched pairs ranked test. Consequently, a significant influence of peer group relationship on learning outcome was found. Obedeagu further found that the more closely related the students were, the more their interrelationship was unconflictual, the more their social interaction was cooperative rather than segregative, the more they achieved academically. In line with the above finding, Hartup (1992) observes that peer groups are very important in middle childhood, being rivalled only by the family in the developmental setting of the child.

In a survey of the relationship between academic performance and extremes of peers' choice among high school students, Mina (1995) sampled a total of 3917 students who were tested socio-metrically to measure peer choices and academic performances in terms of the relative degrees of acceptance: highly accepted, highly rejected and neglected. The study showed that academic performance was highly correlated to the relative degree of acceptance within a classroom. A high level of social acceptance enhances the child's positive attitudes toward school administration where he can freely work with peers, be himself and let others see him being himself. This favourable adjustment process is seen as having the power of promoting the students' level of achievement, as he learns from the teacher as well as from peers. A good social adjustment of a child prepares him for an ideal social life in adulthood. A child in favourable interaction with peers acquires the necessary traits for a meaningful interaction with others in adulthood. In consonance with the above view, Rigney (1998) studied a group of girls whom he taught English composition using group method. This researcher grouped the subjects for the study into different groups and found that the pupils who worked in groups achieved significantly higher than those who worked individually. Since pupil-pupil

relationship affects the learning of English language therefore, every school child must be fully adjusted to the classroom work group for effective participation. In the classroom group, children are expected to play their roles in the process of learning English as a foreign language as they interact positively with each other. This is because the more pupils participate in the study group, the more they learn from it. This position is further maintained by Okonkwo (1995) who posits that a child who is socially rejected develops feelings of insecurity and inferiority because it seems to him that if he is not worthy of peer love, he is evidently worthless.

Students are more positive about having youngsters as work partners. In his socio-metric studies in two communities, Johnson (1994) notes that in a regular classroom, socio-metric acceptance scores increased as much as 2.0 while rejection scores decreased as low as 1.0. The study shows that reasons for rejection are not because of un-acceptance behaviour such as bullying, fighting, showing-off and apparent inability or desire to conform to group standard of behaviour but due to poor academic ability of the child concerned. Student-student social relationship serves as an organiser and motivator of students, which Smead and Chase (1991) also thought influenced outcomes such as interaction with textbooks, lessons, assignments and the school (authority) administration. Wright (1996), in a variety of studies, reveals that with increasing age, peer relationships are more likely to be formed and more likely to be successful. Four-year-olds, for instance, spend about two-thirds of the time when they are in contact with other people associating with adults and one-third with peers. Eleven-year-olds, in contrast, spend about an equal amount of time with adults and with peers. A number of factors such as sharing inner thoughts, wishes, ability to understand and needs and feelings of others, contribute to this shift in interactive patterns. A determination in the social acceptance level of children has negative effects on the behaviour of the individual students. A high ability child who is socially-maladjusted in school often develops negative attitudes toward school administration. Such an attitude is evidenced by the way he/she completes assignment and voluntarily participates in learning activities.

The Problem

At school, the child is under the influence of not only the teacher and the books he reads, but also of the friends he begins to make. This group of friends is referred to as his peer group. Pupils in their day-to-day life come into contact with several boys and girls and acquire various kinds of perception. These processes continue for a long period without undergoing any change in content, leading to attitude formation.

A peer group is a homogenous age group with much influence on the operation of the school system. On the playing field, the games master experiences the helping as well as the distracting groups. Among the identified types of peers are the fun, academic, vocational and delinquent (Ohen, 1997). The fun group goes to school but places a high priority on meeting with friends and arranging future fun activities or similar activities more than participating in academic work or vocationally – related learning. If serious work is demanded, students in this group take the easy way by copying from those who had done the assignment. They are generally fond of truancy. The academic types of adolescents have value for hard work. These peers mount pressure on one another to attend school regularly and to dress neatly and smartly. This scenario gives rise to one research question and one null hypothesis.

Research Questions: Is there any relationship between peer group influence and students' academic achievement in Social Studies?

Null Hypothesis H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and students academic achievements in social studies

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The sample comprised 160 Junior Secondary School (JSS, III A) students drawn from ten out of the nineteen secondary schools in Calabar South Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Instrument: Two instruments were used for this study: (i) Peer Group Influence Assessment Questionnaire (PGIAQ) comprising six activities peers engage in presented in 4-point Likert-scale SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agreed) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree) (ii) Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT). This consisted of a 50 – item multiple choice questions in Social Studies validated by test experts. These instruments were trial- tested and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 obtained.

Procedure of Data Collection

The PGIAQ was first administered to the students followed by SSAT which lasted one hour.

RESULT

The result of the data analysis is presented in table below

Table: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between Peer Group Influence and Students' Academic Achievement in Social Studies.

N = 160					
Variables	x	Σx^2	Σy^2	Σxy	r
Peer Group Influence	798	2424		3428	0.36
Students' Academic Achievement in Social Studies	2037	3142			
P = 0.05	df = 158			critical r = 196	

The result of the analysis here reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.36 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.196 at 0.05 level of significance with 158 degrees of freedom (df). With this the null hypothesis (H_{01}) was rejected. This implied that there is a significant relationship between peer group influence and students' academic achievements in Social Studies.

DISCUSSION

The focus of this research was on the relationship between peer group influence and students' academic achievements in Social Studies. The null hypothesis was not supported by the result of the data analysis. This is in line with Hart-up (1992), Ezewu (1983) and Obedeagu (1991) who found out that there was a significant relationship between peer group influence and students' academic achievements in Social Studies.

In a society that has a tradition of individualism, it may seem strange to emphasize the study of groups of people rather than individuals. We like to see individuals with minds of their own, and we decry anything that looks like slavish conformity. Yet all of us are influenced in basic attitudes and values by our families, confirm to some of the norms of our peer groups in childhood, and are sensitive to the judgments of our neighbours, associates and fellow workers. We look to friends and kinsmen for moral support and for psychological security. The achievement goals that we seek are generally meaningful and worth our strife only if they are highly regarded by the groups to which we belong. Group pressures help us to obey the laws in most cases, but membership in deviant gangs can encourage disobedience. Group pressures can make cowardly conformists of us in some cases, and under other circumstances can make us into self-sacrificing heroes. The group can impose its tyranny upon us, but it can also be our protector. It is not an exaggeration to say that the presence or absence of meaningful ties can be the determining factor as to whether we wish to live or die.

CONCLUSION

The major conclusion forwarded by this research is that there was a significant positive relationship between peer group influence and students' academic achievements in Social Studies.

The present study conducted among a sample of 160 Junior Secondary School III A students in Calabar South Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria has added to a growing body of international research concerned with peer group influence on students' academic achievements. The result has confirmed the conclusion drawn by Obedeagu (1991) and Okonkwo (1995) the peer group influences students' academic achievements.

Examination taking itself is a task. Students who attribute their successful performances to internal factors (ability and effort) would feel really ashamed at their failure and would put in more effort to ensure success while those who attribute their performances to external forces (chance and task difficulty) are known to be non-task-oriented. They are likely to resort to unethical methods of ensuring success to avoid the shame associated with failure. Group dynamics needs to be studied from the view point of the development of the pupils whose needs are mainly related to group living

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